

EVERY OTHER SUNDAY

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A CHRISTMAS LEGEND.

BY LINA BROOKE.



IN the days when the Gospel was first preached among the wild nations who inhabited the west of Europe, Ireland was converted by Saint Patrick and his followers. Many monasteries were founded, and so many pious and learned men grew up in them that the island was known as the "Isle of Saints." One of these monks, the good Columba, whose name signifies a "dove," was much moved by the thought that the neighboring kingdom of the Picts, who lived in the northern part of Scotland, was yet wholly given up to idolatry. He wished to establish a mission among them; and to effect his purpose, he determined to found a monastery on one of the desolate islands which fringe the western coast of Scotland. From such a monastery monks could come and go among the Picts, and always have a secure place of retreat.

Sailing from Ireland and going to the North, he settled on the barren island of Iona, out of sight of his former home. Here he founded the great monastery, the ruins of which exist to this day. From Iona many missionaries were sent forth, who in time converted the whole of Scotland to the Christian faith:

Some time after the death of Columba, two monks from the monastery of Iona—Cormac and Ronan—set out on a pilgrimage to Rome. There they met a young priest, Ambrose, who listened with great interest to all the stories they had to tell him of the wild northern lands whence they came. Ambrose was never tired of hearing of the lonely monastery washed by the waves of the Atlantic. At last he felt so drawn toward it that he resolved to devote his life to its service, and begged the pilgrims to take him with them on their return. All they told him of the perils of the way could not deter him; and he left Rome with them, first helping his new friends to visit all the shrines of the sacred city.

The party travelled over land on foot through Piedmont and France, and set sail from St. Malo in Brittany, in a small coasting-vessel bound for Ireland, intending to travel through that island and set sail again from its northern coast for Iona. The boat was small, manned by but two men, and very rude and clumsy in comparison with the rudest boats we see now. The season also was very far advanced; and Ambrose, who had all his life been accustomed to a warm climate, began to suffer greatly from the cold. He did not complain, however; for when he decided to be a missionary, he had expected nothing but a life of hardship. They were hardly in sight of the Irish coast, when a terrible gale from the northwest blew them so far out of their course, that when it abated they knew no longer where they were, and seemed to see a strange sky above them. They might have reached that unknown western land of which there were rumors even then, but when the wind changed it blew them toward the north. There were no compasses in those days, and mariners guided their course by the sun and stars alone. Our travellers recognized the Polar star, and only waited another change of wind to sail to the eastward.

The short days seemed very strange to Ambrose. The sun hardly shone at all, and then far to the southward, so that his rays gave them no warmth. The poor sailors were almost overcome by fatigue and cold, and the three monks took their turn in sailing the rude craft; for both Cormac and Ronan had made several voyages, and understood all the seamanship that could then be known.

On the third morning after the south wind had begun to blow, when they seemed, against their will, to be going farther and farther into the dark north, as Ambrose was seated near Ronan, who was keeping the watch on deck, he saw what seemed to him a most wonderful sight. A great mountain of ice was coming floating to-

ward them. The sun, which was low down on the horizon, cast its level beams upon it, and made it shine with a thousand brilliant colors; while the snow which covered its summit was touched with a rosy glow. Ambrose looked at it with wonder. He had never seen anything like it before.

"Surely," he said to Ronan, "so beautiful a sight cannot be the work of any evil power or witchcraft."

"No, my son," said Ronan; "we are now drifting into the cold North, and are not far from the land where all is solid ice which never melts. This mountain which you see is but a fragment which has broken from the mass around it, and is drifting southward. Nevertheless, it is our duty to watch and be on our guard, for there is much magic and dark witchcraft in these northern lands."

Ambrose became deeply thoughtful, and looked into the waste of waters around him with more of solemn awe than terror; though, with the feelings of his time, he fully believed in the power of evil spirits to molest us, especially in the lonely places of the earth.

The wind now turned to the westward; and our voyagers were glad, though too far north to be carried by it to the Scottish Isles. They now began to suffer greatly from hunger; and one of the sailors fell ill. The three priests agreed to save all but the scantiest portion of their provisions for him; but they soon had none left to save, and on one of the short winter days they found themselves utterly destitute. The sailors had lost all count of time; but Ronan, who was an old sailor, had counted every day, and told his companions it was Christmas Eve.

It was the custom in those days to keep Christmas and the other great festivals of the church as feasts, and to fast on the day before them; so Ambrose thought, "We should fast to-day if we had food at command; and the Lord can give us a feast to-morrow, if it is His will."

No persons could be more destitute than their company. One sailor was ill, and the other was quite exhausted by the care and labor that had come upon him; but the three companions did their best, and their greatest grief was that they could not make any preparations for celebrating the Christmas festival. It was the shortest day in the year; and when the sun had set it grew very dark, for the night was cloudy. Ambrose was steering the helm,—for Cormac was at the sail, and Ronan waiting on the two sick sailors,—when looking westward he saw a bright red glow on the horizon. It was just in the direction in which he had been told to steer the ship; and as he drew nearer and nearer he saw flames leaping up into the air, and perceived that it was a huge fire, while the dark shadow of a mountain thrown across it showed that they were approaching a rocky coast.

He called up Ronan, and soon the whole company were in consultation over this strange sight. The coast was dangerous and full of sunken rocks, over which the waves broke with a loud roaring. The fire, they thought, must have been kindled by human hands, and they knew not whether by friend or foe; but they were bitterly cold and without food and water, so they decided to land on this unknown coast.

The fire guided them, and after steering for some time with great difficulty, they succeeded in landing as by a miracle. They secured their boat and climbed up the rocky shore, carrying the sick sailor with them. They reached the fire, whose warmth was most refreshing to them; but they almost feared to enjoy it, when they saw not a soul in sight.

Cormac thought that the fire was the work of evil spirits who wished to lure them to this lonely coast to their destruction; but Ambrose said, "I will not believe that the powers of evil have any power on this blessed eve of Christmas. The Lord has provided us warmth; to-morrow He may spread a feast for us. See, here are dried logs of wood with which we can keep the blaze from dying out."

They gathered round the fire, which was built on a rock from which the snow had been scraped away, and kept themselves warm in the night, taking turns at the watch. Before morning their stock of fuel threatened to give out, and Ambrose volunteered to go down to the beach in search of driftwood. The night was very dark, and though for a while the fire guided him, he soon found it difficult to find his way; and on the beach where he could see it no longer, he dared only walk a step at a time by feeling, lest he should fall into the water.

Suddenly it grew lighter about him, and looking up he saw a rosy glow in the heavens which could not come from the sun, for it was in the northern sky. The glow grew deeper, and flashes of light of the most beautiful colors shot across it. It was almost as bright as day, and Ambrose made haste to gather an armful of driftwood to carry back to the fire.

Ronan met him. "Ah, my son!" he said, "I wished to join you, fearing you might be greatly alarmed. That light you see, which appears to have no earthly cause, is not the work of magic. It is often seen in the winters of the far North. Its cause I know not, and it is not steady like the sun, but comes and goes. Hitherto the sky has been so overcast that we have not seen it; but now it is clearing, and we might see the stars, if this stronger light did not blind us to them."

"No, my father, I was not afraid," answered Ambrose. "Who would fear witchcraft on Christmas Eve? And if it were the work of evil spirits, what can even they do against a good Christian who has no fear, even of death? Let me go and bring more wood while this wonderful light lasts."

"Ah," said Ronan, "it was well we brought you with us. I see that you have the heart for work in this wild North. Go and get more wood, and if you can find a stream of running water under the snow, bring some back in this little cask; it is not good to eat the melted snow. You will soon have the light of the sun, which you must use well, it lasts now for such a short time. While you are gone I will clean and prepare some of this low-growing moss which clings to the rocks. It will at least keep us from starving, and I have lived on it before now."

Ambrose hurried off again, while Ronan prepared a scanty meal of sea moss for himself and his companions. It did not satisfy their hunger; still it strengthened them somewhat, and they felt still more encouraged when the late dawn appeared. The sun only showed itself for a few moments on the southern horizon; but it was clear, and to their joy the wind was at last favorable for returning to the South.

"Had we only some provisions to carry with us," said they, "we would leave this dreary country at once, as soon as Ambrose returns."

But Ambrose did not come, and they began to feel anxious about him. They called to him; but he had evidently gone too far away to hear them. They even left their fire to search for him, but dared not go far, for fear of losing more of their party. They knew that there were strange and fierce beasts in those desolate lands, of which the most dreaded was the great white bear, which could easily overpower a few men who had only the rude weapons of the time to defend themselves with, but was generally frightened away by the sight of fire. As time passed, their alarm increased, for the day was so short they feared Ambrose could not come back before it grew dark again; but at last, to their great joy, they heard a cheerful call from the beach, and saw that Ambrose was coming toward them, though so heavily laden that he made but slow progress. They ran to help him, and saw to their surprise that he carried, besides the water-cask, a rude basket and some warm wraps of bear skin.

He would not tell them his adventures till he had reached the camp and they had all had a drink from the clear water which he had brought. Then with great pride he opened his basket, and took out first a piece of fresh meat; then a curiously shaped vessel of deer horn, the like of

which they had never seen before. He passed it to them, and they perceived, when tasting its contents, that it was filled with a liquor like wine, though of a different color. To complete his stores, Ambrose had brought some hard bread, evidently not made from wheat; but, with the meat, most welcome to hungry men.

"This is indeed wonderful, my son," said Ronan; "you have brought new life to our fainting bodies."

"I shall bring new life to your fainting souls too," said Ambrose, "when I tell you the most wonderful thing of all. You would not believe, would you, if I should say I have just been keeping the Christmas feast among Christian men, who are living not far from here and would be glad to welcome you too?"

"There are no Christians so far to the north," answered Ronan. "If you met with any, they must be castaways like ourselves."

"They were living here as if it were their home," said Ambrose. "Let us spread our feast, and I will tell you my adventures."

He would not begin his story till they had all gathered in a circle round the fire, and, grace being said, had begun upon their Christmas feast. Ambrose excused himself from eating, as he said he was already well satisfied, and began:—

"When I left you for the second time this morning and went down to the beach, I noticed a point farther on, where the driftwood appeared to be more abundant. I went in search of it, and found to my surprise that on the other side of the cape was a little harbor, by which there were some rude huts. There was a great collection of dried wood heaped up, from which I could have taken at my will, for no one appeared to be in the huts. Near the shore was moored a large and beautiful vessel, round which the ice had formed. The prow was most curiously carved, and above was the figure of a raven holding a serpent in his claws. I noticed another fire farther up the hill; and as it grew lighter I saw beside it another hut of rough earth and stone which appeared to be inhabited, for I saw people coming in and out to heap fuel on the flames."

"I walked up the hill, and looked in. Judge of my surprise when I saw, in the interior of a building which had looked so contemptible on the outside, a large hall, in the centre of which was spread a bountiful feast, while crowds of men were sitting comfortably around it. In the centre was the head of a huge boar, his great tusks preserved and gilded with care. At the head of the board was a man of middle life and noble countenance, who I think must be some baron or lord of this wild country."

"All appeared so joyfully occupied with their feast that no one noticed me. At length I approached a young man who sat near the door, and pointing to the food tried to tell him by signs that I was hungry. You have told me that the barbarians of the North will give no help to shipwrecked travellers; but this stranger had no sooner understood me than he offered me to drink from this flask. I found the draught most reviving, though I dared not take much of the liquor, which seemed very powerful."

"We were now observed by the lord of the table, who wished that I should be brought before him. A lady was seated by him, and at her side a beautiful maiden, both with rich jewelled clasps to their fur robes. To my amazement the chief said some words to me which seemed to be in the Frankish tongue, and he appeared surprised that I did not understand them. I thought there was a look of anger in his blue eyes; but he motioned me to eat, and I obeyed. Then he put his hand on the boar's head, and each of the company followed his example. I thought they wished me to admire so fine a work of their hands, so I touched it too and expressed my admiration. Then every one who sat at meat gave me some food. Much of it was coarse and strange; still I ate what was set before me."

"I tried by signs to make them understand that I had comrades in distress; and they gave

me this meat and these warm robes, as if they could not bear that any one should be cold and hungry on this feast of Christmas. The young man to whom I had first spoken came with me to help me bring them; but he stopped on the way to replenish a fire on the shore, and not wishing to keep you waiting, I brought all the food myself; but I doubt not that he will soon follow."

"We must fly before he comes, if it be possible," exclaimed Ronan. "I see it all now. The wind, which has blown us out of our course, has landed us on the shores of the country of the Northmen. Their land is wild and barren, but they live on the fruits of other lands and other men's industry. Every year, when the spring sun melts their icy harbors, they set sail for warmer climes, and rob and murder whomsoever they will, and take what goods they covet. They are heathen; and the wind has brought us, as it were, into the jaws of death. The raven with the serpent in his claw is the crest of the sea-king, Thorliof the Mighty, who but a year ago ravaged our monastery on the coast of Mull; and he has vowed, when he sails again, to destroy Iona itself."

"But I cannot believe they are heathen," said Ambrose. "Why, then, do they keep the Christmas feast?"

"The Christians are not the only ones who feast at this time," answered Ronan. "The sun is very dear to these children of the North. They worship many gods. The most powerful one they call Odin, who they say has but one eye, and that eye is the sun. When the days have lessened to their shortest time, and they know that henceforth the sun will rise earlier and earlier and come back to visit the earth again, they all keep a festival, which they call the Yuletide feast. They kindle fires on every hill, and drink mead,—the powerful liquor that you have here. They do not look forward to the Christian's heaven, but say that their bravest warriors shall drink mead forever and carouse in Valhalla; so that their very heaven may be said to be a place of wickedness and license. Their Yuletide idol is that very boar's head which you have seen, and on it they are accustomed to swear that they will in the course of the year perform their cruel deeds. Had you been dressed as we are, Thorliof would have instantly known you. As it was, he seems to have suspected you; but when you touched the boar's head, he thought you a heathen like himself, and hence his change towards you. I should think it a deadly sin to touch any of their idols, or mix with their dark magic; but as you did it unknowingly, may God forgive you! Your ignorance and God's providence have mercifully preserved us."

Ambrose looked grieved, and was sunk in deep thought; while the stronger sailor said,—

"Let us waste no more time. This meat, which we can preserve by freezing, and this bread will last us for a few days. Better the fury of the waves than the mercies of Thorliof. We will sail at once."

They all hastened to the shore; but Ambrose said,—

"Ah, my father, why should we be in such haste to go? If our business be to convert the heathen, where can we find one who needs us more than Thorliof? Surely we do not value our lives, and did not come here to save them."

"That is true," said Ronan. "I would gladly stay, so far as I myself am concerned; but you know I am the bearer of letters to our abbot, who will expect both Cormac and me before this time."

Ambrose said no more, but did his best to help the others unfasten the half-frozen cable which bound their little boat to the shore. They were all on board with their provisions before Thorliof's retainer came in sight. They expected Ambrose to follow them, leaving him, as he was the youngest and strongest, to cast off the cable, and push the craft from the rocks.

He did push them off, and when there was a wide gulf between them he said, in a loud and cheerful voice,—

"Farewell! You must go back to Iona; but your abbot does not know that I am coming, and my call is to stay here. Do not hinder me or yourselves!" as they remonstrated, and tried to bring back their craft to the shore again. "I cannot go and let Thorliof, heathen as he is, think that Christians have not even thanked him for his courtesy. I cannot bear, too, that he should think I have joined in his worship, and left the service of my Lord to make vows to idols. So noble a man as Thorliof shall not remain a heathen, if my weak words can turn him to the light. I see now why I felt so called upon to travel to the North with you. Farewell!"

"Farewell, my son!" called Ronan. "The Lord's grace be with you!"

The poor little bark, which had been so tempest-tossed, felt at last a favoring breeze, which soon wafted it to the coast of Scotland, where Ronan and Cormac landed, and crossing the kingdom, reached Iona from the other side. They told their adventures to their abbot, and all the monks listened with interest to the story of Ambrose; but they could not believe that Thorliof the Mighty would be turned from his course, and when the spring came they waited in trembling for the sight of the white sails of his squadron off their island.

But Thorliof never came, neither that year nor the next; nor was the sign of the eagle with the serpent in his claw ever seen again on the shores where he had before carried such terror. Time went on, but Thorliof never returned. So far off was his home that the monks of Iona could not find out what had become of him or of Ambrose, whom in time they looked upon as dead, though they blessed him as their deliverer.

No traveller in those days would have sought the northern part of Norway, either for business or pleasure; it was an unknown land except to its hardy inhabitants. But years after, when the Norwegian king, Olaf Trygvason, being converted himself, wished to spread Christianity among his subjects, he found the northern portion of them not given over to heathenism, as he had expected, but partially Christian. The people practised many Christian rites, for which they could give no reason, further than that their great chief, Thorliof the Mighty, had practised them, and commanded them to do so too. When asked who had instructed Thorliof, they answered, it was a young man who had lived among them but a year,—who had appeared mysteriously at the feast of Yuletide, which he had kept with them; and had made Thorliof promise that as he had kept the feast of Yule, so Thorliof should keep with him the feast of Christmas, which Thorliof had done,—the stranger, who had come from a land where the sun always shone, only living long enough to keep it with him.

The monks could not believe that a man who had joined in heathen rites could have been a Christian missionary, had it not been that those whom he taught had evidently become Christian. "What!" they exclaimed, "was this chief who turned his people to Christianity Thorliof the Mighty? Have we not always heard of him as the mightiest of the heathen? Did he not burn and ravage many a Christian church and holy monastery?"

"It was the same one," answered an old man, who remembered Thorliof. "Our chief, Thorliof, was one of those who trusted in the strength of his own arm, and despised those who depended on the White Christ. But when this stranger came to live among us, Thorliof saw that he was a brave man; and as he preached the White Christ in a different manner from others, Thorliof was willing to listen to him. He did not tell us that all our brave ancestors were lost, and shut out forever from the joys of Paradise. 'Those may be saved,' he said, 'who have never heard of Christ, who have followed him in their lives.' Nor did he tell us that all our customs were evil, as do you priests. 'You keep the feast of Yule,' he said; 'that is well, only turn it into the Christmas festival. You feast all your friends, and invite the poor and needy. That is well too. You light

Our Youngest Readers

Will find their Christmas Stories on pages 63 and 64.

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fires on your coasts and mountains. That is well, for you may guide many a lost wanderer on the sea. You keep the birthday of the sun when he begins to return to shine upon these northern lands. Keep it still, and with it the birth of that Sun of Righteousness, who has risen for the healing of the nations. For the boar's head, which you place upon the board, there is no evil in it, as it is a senseless thing in itself; but make no vows upon it, for in so doing you make it into an idol.

"Thorlief listened to this young man, and was baptized in the name of the White Christ; but from that day he never sailed the seas again. 'Should I once,' he said, 'feel myself upon the ocean, I might be too strongly tempted to forget I am a Christian. I should return to my old life, and if I saw a Christian town or monastery, my old love of war and destruction might come back.' So Thorlief must indeed have been a follower of your White Christ, for he loved the sea beyond everything on earth, and yet he gave up sailing upon it lest he should displease him."

The missionaries of King Olaf asked with interest the name of their forerunner in preaching the Gospel in the far North.

"He told us, when he had learned our tongue," answered the old man, "that he wished to be one of us, and not even keep his old name. He lived among us; and the Christmas-tide before he died, Thorlief gave a great feast, to which he invited all the country; and all who wished to follow his example were baptized in the name of the White Christ, whom since then we have worshipped."

It so chanced that some of King Olaf's monks paid a visit to Iona, where they met Ronan, who had become the abbot of the monastery, and now lingered in extreme old age. When he had heard their story, "Ah," he said, "I know of whom you speak, and it was I with others who left him on the cold shores of Norway; and often and often have I wondered of his fate. If more should preach the Gospel as he did, the world would soon be converted to it."

The priests of King Olaf, and others who preached in the North, followed the example set them by the unknown preacher who had preceded them. They still allowed their converts to keep the Yule feast to celebrate the birthday of the sun, only charging them to remember also that it was the birthday of the Sun of Righteousness. So when we light the Christmas fire and keep a feast with our friends, we are really following the example of our northern ancestors as well as of the early Christians; only the reign of Christ has so spread that we never think we are celebrating any birth but his. But let us not think only of the feast, dear children, but keep our Christmas as we ought by taking up the cross and following him; for in so doing, though we may not convert a heathen as did the young priest Ambrose, we shall be spreading the kingdom of that Sun of Righteousness, whose birth we love to keep at Christmas-tide.

THE STORY OF THE PASSION PLAY.

BY MRS. BRADLEY GILMAN.

PART II.



GREAT many children are growing up to-day with absolutely no knowledge of the Bible. Children who can repeat most of "Little Lord Fauntleroy" by heart, and adore every one of the stories in "Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag," know little or nothing about the beautiful Old Testament stories with which their fathers and mothers when young were perfectly familiar. Now, there are a good many reasons for this state

of things. People think very differently about the old Bible stories to-day from what they did fifty years ago, for one reason. Some people are foolish enough to think that because they do not believe that every word in that wonderful Old Testament is literal history, it would be better to stop reading it altogether.

Now, suppose some boy or girl who has never read the Bible thoroughly should have a chance to go to see the great Passion Play. What do you think it would mean to him? Absolutely nothing. All the wonderful tableaux, which to those who have studied the Old Testament mean so much, he would be utterly unable to understand. The whole play would be as meaningless to him as though its subject were not taken from the one book in all the world which every American child ought to know thoroughly.

Now, there are a great many reasons why children should read the Bible. Among them perhaps the one we are going to urge is sometimes forgotten; but it is safe to say that no boy or girl is fitted to travel through Europe and visit the great art galleries of the Old World who does not love and understand the poetry, the mythology, and the history of that grand Old Testament.

But we must return to the Passion Play. At exactly eight o'clock, as we said, a cannon is fired, all conversation is stopped, and the chorus march in and take their places on the stage. There are twenty-four in this chorus,—fourteen maidens as angels and ten men as genii. They form a semi-circle in front of the stage, and are clad in white robes, over which they wear mantles richly embroidered in gold and made of green, violet, dark blue, light blue, orange, brown, red, and crimson. All the members of the chorus wear crowns, and they sing with great sweetness. The words which they sing are taken from the Bible, and are descriptive of the different scenes.

At a word from their leader they draw back each side of the stage, and point to the curtain, which rises on the first of the beautiful tableaux. This tableau is followed by a distant cry of "Hosanna!" and a great assembly of men, women, and children crowd upon the stage, singing and waving branches, many of them spreading their garments in the way, as at last the Christ, dressed in a light gray garment with a crimson robe thrown over it, riding upon an ass, at the head of his disciples, slowly approaches the front of the stage. The face of the Christ was very sad and very beautiful. We wish that we had a photograph of Joseph Meyer to show you, children; but perhaps some of you have seen Guido Reni's picture of Christ, which is much like him. As he came upon the stage, slowly and with great dignity, every eye in the audience was fastened upon him; and he became from that moment the centre of observation.

The next scene was the famous scene in the temple, when Jesus found it full of the money-changers, and drove them out, saying, "My Father's house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves." In this scene Christ holds a whip made of small cords in his hand, and uses it as a scourge. He also takes up the cages, and lets the doves go free. It is a pretty sight to see the timid, fluttering creatures fly gladly off the stage; for they are real doves, children, and probably do not enjoy their part in the play at all. After this the Jews and the gayly dressed multitude become angry and alarmed, and depart in haste. Then Christ, taking his disciples with him, returns to Bethany.

Soon the curtain rises, the chorus again come forward, and an Old Testament tableau is pre-

sented to us. This tableau represents Joseph being cast into the pit by his wicked brethren. It is almost impossible to give an idea of the wonderful beauty of these Old Testament tableaux, they are so rich in color and so artistic in arrangement. Sometimes four hundred people are on the stage at one time; and in one tableau one hundred and fifty children appear at once, and all keep perfectly still for what seems a very long time. Throughout the entire play the rule is first an Old Testament scene and then a New Testament scene. In the Old Testament scenes there is no action, but in the New Testament scenes the actors talk and act just as they do in the real Bible stories.

As the play proceeds, the interest of the spectators becomes more and more intense, and that vast audience sit as if spell-bound. The word "passion" means "suffering;" and as scene succeeds scene, the sufferings of Christ become more and more awful. It seemed hard to sit still and see him scourged and beaten and mocked and finally crucified. Do you wonder, children, that sobs and tears were drawn from grown-up men and women throughout the audience, and that the people who came out with us at the intermission looked as sorrowful as if they had been present at some real scene of suffering?

Think, children, of sitting absolutely still from eight in the morning until twelve at noon, and then returning at one o'clock to remain until six! That is what all those four thousand people did that dismal, rainy Sunday. There was not a sound of applause, not a single hand-clap; and during all those hours the steady patter of the raindrops was the only noise which we heard during the short intermissions. The chorus were out in the rain the entire day, and must have been completely wet through before night; but their costumes were made of such handsome, heavy cloth that they did not look dragged. As for the men and women who sat all those hours with no umbrellas, with the rain beating down on their uncovered heads, it is doubtful if all of them returned alive to their distant homes to tell the story of the Passion Play.

After the intermission another cannon was fired, and again we returned silently to our seats, many of us dreading to look upon the last terrible scenes. First there was the tender parting of Jesus with his mother at Bethany, which left hardly a dry eye in the audience; then there was the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, which to many was the most sorrowful of all the scenes, because mental suffering, children, is harder to bear than physical suffering; and finally, came the Last Supper and the cruel crucifixion. Before that time many a strong man was too much overcome to remain longer, and quietly left the theatre before the play was over.

One of the most thrilling scenes was the one in which Judas comes on the stage in a fit of remorse for betraying his Master. He was dressed in a brilliant orange-colored robe, and had a thick, coarse beard and a mop of dark, curly hair, which fell over his forehead in the wildest possible manner. He had gleaming, fiery eyes, and a fierce, scowling expression of countenance.

"That furtive mien, that scowling eye,
Of hair that red and tufted fell,
It is—oh, where shall Brandon fly?—
The traitor Judas out of hell."

Almost every one grows up with an instinctive horror and hatred of Judas. If we love Christ, how can we help hating his betrayer? But the



THE CHRISTMAS-TREE.

Judas in the play does not seem to us a wholly and hopelessly bad man. He calls forth our sympathy and pity as well as our anger and scorn. We are led to see that he has noble as well as base qualities, but that he has let his lower, animal nature get control of his life, until eventually it drags him down, down into the very depths of crime and villany. At the Last Supper Judas sits a little behind the others, and at the sad words of Christ, "One of you shall betray me," we see him tremble from head to foot. Later, after he has sold his Master for the thirty pieces of silver, we see him in a repentant mood, eaten up with the pangs of remorse, as he flings the money down at the feet of the Jews, and rushes madly away in an agony of repentance to hang himself. No one who saw the Passion Play in 1890 will ever forget the manner in which Judas played his part. Sin never seemed so horrible or yet so mingled with goodness as it did in this interpretation of his character.

And what shall we say of the peasant, Joseph Meyer, who took the great part of Christ, — the Latin name for Christ, and the one always used in speaking of the central figure in the play?

In the first place, he is a man distinguished in the village for his goodness and purity. Canon Farrar says of him: "I believe Josef Meyer to be an entirely devout, sincere, humble-minded man, who does not love that fame of the world which is always half defame." He has a beautiful and spiritual face, and with his long, soft, curling hair and large, sad eyes looks the part to perfection. When we come to criticise his acting, there is so much difference of opinion that it is hard to be fair about it. We personally thought him too old for the part, and missed in his acting a certain quality of freshness. Perhaps he filled the part more satisfactorily twenty years ago. Now he has a daughter old enough to take the part of the Virgin Mary, — and a very sweet Virgin Mary she makes.

Peter Reidle, who takes the part of the Apostle John, is a young boy not more than fifteen or sixteen years old. We met him the morning after the play going home with the cattle, and he looked very full of mischief and fun, in spite of his long, curling hair. Of course, all the principal actors must allow their hair to grow long, following the custom of the days of Christ; and this gives to many of the villagers a very picturesque appearance.

A great many children take part in the different scenes and tableaux. They are trained to it from their earliest years; and just as you boys and girls look forward to being doctors or lawyers or merchants or ministers, so these children look forward to some time taking the more important parts in this play. It is said that it is very difficult to find any one to take the part of Judas; for the one who acts that part is apt to be looked on with suspicion by the other villagers.

The peasants have ten years to rehearse this great play, so it is not strange that every part is well taken. During the long interval between the plays Oberammergau is very quiet, and has almost no visitors; but the year of the festival it is as crowded as a fashionable watering-place for the three summer months. Between the performances the peasants have very few ways of earning any money; so that when the play is given everybody in the village tries to earn just as much money as is possible. Little barefooted children meet the strangers when they arrive, and offer them every sort of thing for sale. There are photographs and postal cards with pictures of the village in the corners; carved penholders

and salad forks and spoons; eatables of every description; and prayer-books and crucifixes for the Roman Catholics to take home as pious mementos of the place.

Some visitors complain that the peasants overcharge for everything, and they call them mercenary; but we must remember that many of them have to live on the proceeds of the play for ten long years. Suppose we had a chance of making money only once in ten years, would we not make all we could? Prices are high in Oberammergau, undoubtedly; but people understand that before they go there; and as the peasants work hard during the season of the play, and many of them give up their homes to strangers, it is only just that they should be well paid.

Ever since this great Passion Play proved of enough importance to draw strangers to see it, the discussion has arisen as to whether it is right to give a play which has for its subject the sacred life and death of Jesus Christ. To some people the very idea is shocking; while to others this play is like a religious service, and they claim that it really is an act of devotion. Now, Unitarians who are able to witness this great drama may find that they do not agree with either of these two positions. Did they believe that their Master, Jesus Christ, was in truth the Creator of heaven and earth, the Father Almighty, God of gods, and Light of lights, it would seem to them most horrible blasphemy to have any mortal man attempt to take as his the part of Christ. But thinking, as we do, that Christ was the son of God but human like ourselves — filled with the spirit of God but certainly not God himself — our feelings are not so painfully lacerated by having this part taken imperfectly; for although Josef Meyer looks his part and has very few faults, he certainly does not satisfy our grand conception of what the Christ should be, still less of what our Creator should be.

Jesus Christ stands as the world's ideal to-day, and no mortal man can expect to bear comparison with him. The attempt to do this does not strike us as blasphemous, but as impossible. Jesus holds a place in the hearts of millions of human beings which so far no other being has been able to take. And it seemed to us that it was his humanity which was brought out the most strongly in this great Passion Play. It was not the miracles which he performed that touched the vast audience most keenly, — indeed, these seemed tawdry, and were the least impressive part of the great performance; but it was the Man Jesus, whose heroic life and agonizing death compose the material for that wonderful story which has transformed the world.

And now, children, do you understand any better what the great Passion Play is, and why it is? It is one of the wonders of the world that it should have been kept up so long, and lasted into this nineteenth century. Perhaps ten years from now some of you may have an opportunity of seeing it for yourselves. It will certainly make many of the Bible scenes more real for you; and it may give you a deeper appreciation of that old, old story of the life and death of Jesus, which never has ceased, and never will cease, to influence and elevate the spiritual life of man.

A GOOD heart breaks bad luck. — *Cervantes.*

"Who seeks a faultless friend, rests friendless."

It all cannot live on the piazza, every one may feel the sun. — *Italian Proverb.*

WHATSOEVER we beg of God, let us also work for it. — *Jeremy Taylor.*

A SONG-STORY.

BY M. C. S.

"It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold, —
'Peace on the earth! good-will to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King!'
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing."

'T was Christmas Eve. The chimes rang out
Along the wintry sky,
And down within the busy street
The hurrying throngs passed by;
While round about and in and out
Ever the sweet old strain,
Till boyish voices clear and sweet
Took up the glad refrain.

The dearest little maiden heard;
Listening, she left her play.
'What are they singing for?' she said,
'Is it for Christmas Day?
I think it is, — I heard them then, —
'Peace on the earth! good-will!'
And that is what they always say, —
Hark! they are singing still."

With childhood's ever-questioning gaze
She looked out toward the town;
Still rose the carol voices sweet,
Ever the chimes rang down, —
'Peace on the earth! good-will to men
From heaven's all-gracious King!
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing."

"I never heard the angels sing.
Oh! oh! if I should go
Into the very stillest place,
They'd sing to me, I know!"
So out into the twilight cold
The pattering little feet
Went gayly dancing down the path,
And wandered up the street.

The hurrying throng paid little heed.
One said, "You tiny thing,
Why do you run away so fast?"
"To hear the angels sing,"
Was the reply, as, staying not,
She ran upon her way.
"I want the very stillest place;
To-morrow's Christmas Day."

At last, worn out and cold, the child
No more the path could keep;
She dropped upon a snowy bank,
And sobbed herself to sleep.
But anxious feet were following fast;
A father's loving arm
Clasped close the sleeping little one,
And held her safe from harm.

She wakes not till the mother-voice
Is sounding in her ear;
She looks into the loving face,
Where joy contends with fear.
"Oh, darling, tell me, tell me quick!
Why did you stray away?"
"I went to hear the angels sing;
To-morrow's Christmas Day."

"I did not hear a single one;
For when I found it still,
I fell asleep. I do not know,
Mamma, what happened, till
I found myself here in your arms.
I must have dreamed, — not long, —

I thought for just a little while
I heard an angel song;
But it was only you, Mamma,
'T was your voice that I heard.
What made it seem so sweet, Mamma?
It sounded like a bird."

Ah! little one, with you we'd learn
This holy, blessed thing, —
In our own homes, and every day,
We hear the angels sing.
And when our restless, longing feet
Are straying far and wide,
Come, Father, with Thy loving arm,
And draw us to Thy side.

For Youngest Readers.

[In order to give our youngest readers more stories than usual, we print them in smaller type this time.]

A SLEIGHFUL OF CHRISTMAS HAPPINESS.

BY M. L. F.

NOW, Tommie, don't be naughty; just 'cause we're in the poorhouse ain't no reason why we should n't be good, an' you know Mother would want us to," said Mollie, the elder sister.

"I don't care," said Tommie, sulkily kicking the chair-legs; "it's a horrid old place, anyway, and I won't stay here, so there!"

Mollie tried to hush his loud words, for just then the door opened, and Mrs. Watson, the keeper's wife, showed into the room a lady who was visiting the poor people and looking out for the needs of the old and sick. The lady smiled pleasantly at Mollie, who was busily dusting the furniture, and as she turned away, said to Mrs. Watson, —

"Children here? How does that happen, Mrs. Watson? It is n't often that you have little ones here, I'm sure."

"No; the father is dead and the mother met with an accident last week and is in the hospital, so nothing could be done with the children but to bring them here. Mollie is nine, and Tommie six; and there is a baby two years old, who is asleep now."

"The little girl looks like a nice child, I'm sure."

"Yes, she's as brave as can be and tries her best to keep the others contented; but they miss their mother, of course. They say the poor woman grieves to think that she can do nothing for her children's Christmas. She was earning good wages as a cook in a hotel, but now her pay is stopped. It's only a week to Christmas now, so of course she can't be out before that time."

"The children shall have a Christmas. I'll attend to it gladly, Mrs. Watson," said Mrs. Meade, as she drove away.

The next Sunday Mrs. Meade's primary class in Sunday-school heard all about the little folks at the almshouse who did n't expect any Christmas, and they all wanted to help. There were busy hands and feet and tongues those next three days; and when the bright Christmas morning came, a big sleighful of children jingled up to the door of the almshouse, and Mrs. Watson, who was expecting them, showed them into a large room where Mollie and Tommie and little Bess were playing upon the floor. Oh, how their eyes danced when they saw all the nice things done

up in the bundles the little folks brought, — dolls and toys, candy and oranges, and nice hoods and mittens to keep ears and fingers warm!

The old people were called in, too, to share in the pleasures, and such a good time they all had!

Then the primary class sang their pretty little Christmas songs and recited their pieces, and everybody enjoyed that too. And when they were tired of that, the three little children were bundled up in their warm new garments and packed among the others in the sleigh, and a jolly ride over the crisp snow they had, coming back all rosy and happy to finish their merry Christmas among their new treasures.

And the primary class had such a good time themselves that they thought they would like to do the same thing every Christmas.

CHRISTMAS PIES.

BY MRS. MARY JOHNSON.



DID any of you ever have an Aunt Chloe in your home? Aunt Chloe means a tall, fat colored woman, with a red bandana turban over her woolly locks, a dark print dress, a wide blue-checked apron, and a rolling-pin in her hand. Of course, Aunt Chloe was a cook; and such a cook as anybody may be thankful to have and to hold, to get and to keep. The way she could roast beef and turkey and chicken, dish all manner of vegetables, fry griddle-cakes and doughnuts, put up preserves, and make puddings and pies, was enough to make anybody hungry! Good-natured, too, was Aunt Chloe, — not one of the sort that wants the children "keep out o' the kitchen;" and the little folks loved her dearly.

Three days before Thanksgiving and three before Christmas Aunt Chloe was always in her glory. The good soul was as proud of her cooking as a *prima donna* of her voice; and perhaps it was quite as much for the comfort of those with whom she lived.

Strong of arm and foot and will was Aunt Chloe, and it took a good deal to tire her. But one Christmas she had her hands full. Children and grandchildren were coming to the old homestead. They were to be all together again, and there were a good many of them. She was up at dawn, and busy till night. The great brick oven, built into the wall as people had them in old times, was kept full, — that is, after the boiling and chopping and pounding were through; and the nicely browned mince and apple, and the golden squash pies, as they came forth on the long-handled wooden shovel, were stored on the shelves of the "buttery." More tired than she had been for a year, Aunt Chloe scarcely waited to see the children hang up their stockings, before she took her little night-lamp and went upstairs to bed. She had made sure, however, that the pantry window was closed and the pantry door latched. The latch was an old-fashioned one, such as you may have seen in very old country-houses. One part was raised by pressing the other down.

Carrie and Jamie, the two youngest children except Baby Bertie, had hung their stockings in the corner of the kitchen fireplace. They had spent the day mostly with Aunt Chloe, watching her as she mixed pie-meat with chopped apples, raisins, currants, sugar, and spices; as she beat eggs and poured rich milk into the deep dishes for squash-pies; and then as she rolled out crust, and filled her plates. The brick oven was a wonder to their eyes. They had seen nothing like it in their own home.

"Nor anywhere else," Carrie said; "only, in our books of fairy tales, the pictures of the caverns the brownies live in."

And Jamie answered, "Or the lion's den in my Natural History; it roars like a wild beast too."

They seemed as much interested in the last relay of pies as in the first, — more so, in fact; for as the wooden shovel reached to the farthest corners of the great cavern, it brought to light two golden saucer-pies.

"Oh! oh! oh! Are those for us, Aunt Chloe?" shouted the children, as they danced about the kitchen.

"Yes, honey, all for yer two selves, — eat them right off, or have a doll's tea-party, or anything yer like. There's plenty of the large pies, but I know little folks like little pies of their own."

"So we do. And thank you, Aunt Chloe, — wish you lived with us."

At bedtime, while the mother was lighting the lamp and getting a glass of water for Carrie, a little boy tiptoed into the pantry just for one peep at their saucer-pies, tiptoed out again, and shut the door after him, — latching it, as he thought. But it probably was not latched as firmly as Aunt Chloe had left it; for some time during the hours of darkness and quiet, Pussy Silvertoes thought she heard a mouse, and rousing herself, with a stretch and a yawn, from her basket on the kitchen hearth, started on a survey of the premises, and in so doing, observed that the moonlight shone through a crevice in the buttery door. This implied that the door was not closed as tightly as it might be, and, of course, the latch — well, Pussy settled the question speedily by jumping on the latch, pressing it down by her weight. She jumped off again, and pawed and scratched till she had the door open. In she walked, and looked around. There were pans of milk on the shelves, but Pussy had plenty of milk. There was some left in her dish on the hearth after she had eaten all she could. The beef and turkey were down cellar. Bread and gingerbread she could have any time. She did n't find any custards. But there were the pies, — rows and rows of pies. Mince and apple, — Pussy sniffed; she did n't care for those. But squash-pies, — oh, joy! Those golden-colored pies she knew were always delicious, with milk and eggs and sugar. This was the first-chance she had ever had in her life to eat all she wanted of squash-pie. And if she did n't improve it, she'd know the reason why!

She gave a spring, and landed plump in the middle of a pie. "Whew!" thought Pussy, "this sticks to my paws, — did n't know it felt just like mud! I must get out of this, — me-ow!"

She sat down, however, on the pantry floor, to wash her paws, and liked the taste so well that she went cautiously back to the shelf and helped herself till she was satisfied. Then she returned to her basket, and slept the sleep of — a cat without a conscience.

However, when Aunt Chloe came downstairs bright and early, Pussy Silvertoes prudently took a walk to enjoy the beauty of Christmas morning.

The poor soul was provoked enough at first, and threatened banishment to Pussy; for the imprint of four furry paws left no doubt as to whose the mischief was.

"But it beats me," said she, "how that cat managed to get into the buttery. I fastened the window and latched the door."

The family were at breakfast. Jamie left his place, and went round to his grandmother's chair.

"Grandma," he said, nestling at her side and getting hold of her hand, "I'm afraid I let Pussy

in. I went in to look at our saucer-pies, and maybe I did n't quite latch the door. I'm sorry — and you may have my pie."

"Bless your heart!" Grandma put her arm around him, and drew him closer. "It is Christmas morning, dear, and I think we can excuse a little boy, and Pussy too. You and Carrie may have your saucer-pies for breakfast, if you like."

CARL AND LUCIE'S CHRISTMAS GIFT.

BY C. A. H.

IT was the day-before Christmas. Carl and Lucie, two little German children, sat looking out of the window, sorrowfully watching the big snowflakes come whirling down.

"Oh, dear!" at last exclaimed Carl, as a big tear rolled down his cheek, "what did make us come to this dreadful forest to live, where there are n't any Christmas-trees or nice things at all?"

"I don't know," said Lucie. "Just think how beautiful it is at home in Germany now, with the stores all trimmed with green and lighted up, and the windows full of toys and candies, and the trays of gingerbread animals all along the streets, that taste, oh, so good!"

"Yes, don't they?" said Carl. "You had a horse and cow, and I had an elephant and a monkey last year, didn't we? and I want one now so much." And the poor little boy began to cry hard.

"Hush!" said Lucie, "or you will make the mother sicker; and that you must not do."

Carl cried softly to himself; and his sister sat with her chubby face all wrinkled up, thinking very hard.

"Carl," said she at last, "I'll tell you what we can do. We will go out in the forest and cut down a tree, a very small tree, — I know where there is one, — and bring it home and put it close to the window, and perhaps the Christ-child will come; who knows?"

"Do you really think he could find us, way off here in the forest, Sister?" asked Carl, half smiling through his tears.

"I don't really know," said Lucie; "but perhaps he will, — and we can get a tree, anyway."

She stepped softly across the floor, and peeped into the room where the dear mother lay sick; and finding her asleep, the two children put on their hats and coats, and went out into the forest. Lucie carried a small hatchet, and Carl dragged his dear red sled, which had been on the Christmas-tree for him last year. They trudged patiently through the snow, still talking of the good times in Germany.

"Did n't the tree look beautiful last Christmas, when the candles were all lighted, and the toys and dolls all glistened in the light?" said Carl. "Oh! I don't believe the Christ-child will come way over to America, Sister."

"Well, Carl, if he does n't," said Lucie, "we will have the tree for Mamma; and I have knit her some nice stockings, and we can hang those on, and it will please her, I know."

"So we will," said Carl, clapping his hands; "how surprised she will be!"

"Here is the tree," said Lucie; "is n't it a pretty one, Carl? Now I will chop until I am tired, and then you may."

Both children were very tired before the little fir-tree was chopped down; but at last it tumbled over into the snow, and was dragged home very proudly on the sled. After supper the children

brought it into the house and put it close by the window, opening it at the top a little way, "so," as Lucie explained to her father, "if the Christ-child came he would be sure to see it." The poor father looked at the tree, and wished so much he could cover it with gifts, as usual; and he too felt homesick that night for Germany. Lucie and Carl hung the stockings on the tree, and then went to kiss Mamma good-night. After they had said their usual prayers, Lucie added, "Dear Heavenly Father, if it is n't too far, please send the Christ-child with a present for us, way off here in America."

"I am afraid it will be too far for him to come, my little children," said their mother, as she kissed them both many times.

Carl and Lucie were soon fast asleep, dreaming of lovely trees, gingerbread horses, and other good things. Lucie waked up just as it was light, and calling Carl, they ran into the room where the tree stood. At first they could see nothing but the stockings hanging from a branch; but presently Carl exclaimed, "Look, Sister, what is that little white thing way up high?" Lucie looked, and found, curled up asleep on a branch, a dear little snow-bird. She took it in her hands, and found it was quite cold and stiff and one of its wings was bruised. But the children were delighted with their gift. "See, ah, see what the Christ-child brought us!" they cried, as they carried the little bird in to show to their mother. They warmed and fed the little waif, and presently it began to chirp and hop about. So pleased were the children, that they almost forgot that they had had no toys or candies.

"I thought if we asked the dear Father in heaven to send the Christ-child to us, he would," said Lucie; "and you see he did n't forget us even way out here in the forest."

LITTLE KATIE'S FIRST CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

BY K. H.



IT was so long ago that Christmas-trees trimmed with lighted candles, gayly colored cornucopias filled with candy, and pretty toys of all kinds did not grow in New England.

In the village where Katie lived when she was a little girl, it seemed as though people sometimes forgot to rejoice as the multitude of the heavenly host did on the first Christmas Eve, nearly two thousand years ago, when they sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." At any rate, Katie's elders did not show their "good-will" by Christmas gifts.

Why Katie and her brothers and sisters hung up their stockings year after year, they themselves did not know, for they usually were as empty in the morning as in the evening when they put them in a row on the mantelpiece. "Santa Claus did not find them," Katie thought.

Now, Katie was a sleepy head, and the older ones were always dressed and gone when she awoke in the morning, and she went to bed first too. This "Merry Christmas" morn she dressed as fast as she could, for she was in just as much of a hurry to look into her stocking as though she did not remember that the year before, John and Polly had, in their disgust at finding their own empty, put the shovel and tongs, standing conveniently near the fireplace, into the stockings of the younger children.

And so Katie ran downstairs. "Oh, joy! there is something in my stocking this time, —

something nice, too, for it is all wrapped up in paper."

There was the most lovely little rabbit, — not a real live one, but one made of Canton flannel, with black beads for eyes, and pink inside its ears, Willy, her little brother, had a smaller one spotted with black, and black ears. How beautiful they were!

Katie ran about the house, and showed her rabbit to every one, even to the old cat, and said "Merry Christmas" again and again. But they were all too busy to answer her, except puss; and the old cat, like the rest of the family, did not act any happier because Christmas had come.

So Katie sat down in her little chair to wait for breakfast, contented and happy with her little rabbit, so soft and white and pretty. And this was Katie's first Christmas present.

A LITTLE KINGDOM.

A LITTLE kingdom I possess,
Where thoughts and feelings dwell;
And very hard I find the task
Of governing it well.
For passion tempts and troubles me,
A wayward will misleads,
And selfishness its shadow casts
On all my words and deeds.

How can I learn to rule myself,
To be the child I should, —
Honest and brave, and never tire
Of trying to be good?
How can I keep a sunny soul
To shine along life's way?
How can I tune my little heart
To sweetly sing all day?

Dear Father, help me with the love
That casteth out my fear;
Teach me to lean on thee, and feel
That thou art ever near;
That no temptation is unseen,
No childish grief too small,
Since thou with patience infinite
Dost soothe and comfort all.

I do not ask for any crown
But that which all may win;
Nor try to conquer any world
Except the one within.
Be thou my guide until I find,
Led by a tender hand,
Thy happy kingdom in myself,
And dare to take command.

Louisa M. Alcott.

CHEERFULNESS is the weather of the heart.
'T WAS a thief said the last kind word to Christ;
Christ took the kindness, and forgave the theft.
Browning.

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